

**CONTEMPORARY WAR ETHICS:
QUEST FOR A METAPHYSICAL SOLUTION
TO THE PROBLEM OF MORAL VALUE
IN RECENT DEBATES.
AN ANSWER IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND
PHILOSOPHY.**

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After a review of some of the key problems in modern ethical theory as relates to war and violent state conflicts, I will focus on St Gregory Palamas' views on War and Peace and what we can learn from Palamas' hesychastic approach regarding the social and political phenomenon of violence and war. My discussion will close with a brief examination of the problems related to the perspective termed 'political hesychasm' (which is used in the debates related to the recent war in Ukraine) and how this political and cultural perspective bears no relevance to the true hesychastic approach (and Palamite hesychasm in particular).

Introductory remarks: key points on terminology

Today, 79 years after the most bloodstained world war on our planet with the 75 million deaths, with the resulting foundation of the United Nations (a union of nations that now has 193 member states and was created for the achievement of world peace), we are farther away than ever before from any hope of achieving world peace. Two major wars with the potential to evolve into global or world wars are now ongoing (in Ukraine, which started in 2022 and in Gaza, which started in 2023) together with other ongoing and potential explosive conflicts; currently, from only these two wars we have tens of thousands who have been killed and wounded already and millions of refugees. Advances in technology and political institutions have not helped much. It is now, more than ever,

obvious to many that the adoption of new technologies and ‘smarter’ weapons (which were developed partly to the perceived need to limit in a ‘smart’ way casualties of war) made war related decisions more ruthless, uncontrollable, unchecked, unjust, and stupid; we are living in times where real war has gained virtual reality dimensions, causing intense real pain and real deaths to the many powerless and weak in this real world. Warmongers and big corporations are making more profit from trading weapons, oil, liquified gas, and other commodities during today’s conflicts than ever before (e.g., in a recent report, four major western oil companies made more than \$200bn in profit from the war in Ukraine in just one year).¹ Unfortunately, all these facts about war are known and well documented in human history; some have been analysed in detail for centuries. It seems however, that the more than two thousand years study of war by social science related disciplines has not made us wiser.

Philosophers, poets, historians, social analysts, and theologians have discussed these facts (i.e., previous versions of the facts under consideration today) from time immemorial. Those that believe that war is inevitable have developed rules of war to keep war within moral checks and make peace possible again, after a war is finished. They have also developed arguments about what kind of reasons can be used to initiate or engage in war. In European literature, we see first evidence of this in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Herodotus’ *Histories*, and Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In medieval Europe, Augustine and Aquinas developed this topic further (formulating the basics for making a distinction between *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello*), and the Byzantines also developed similar arguments in the many surviving texts of political philosophers and historians like Psellus, Choniates, and Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus; they tried to combine Ancient Greek and Roman thinking on war, enriching them with relevant discussions in earlier Jewish and Christian scriptures and other patristic texts.

¹ Sweney, Mark, 2024, ‘World’s largest oil companies have made \$281bn profit since invasion of Ukraine: Global Witness says the five “super-majors” are the “main winners of the war” while many struggle to heat their homes,’ *The Guardian*, 19/02/2024, (<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/feb/19/worlds-largest-oil-companies-have-made-281bn-profit-since-invasion-of-ukraine>), accessed 12/07/2024

Related ideas have been proposed in all human languages, cultures and civilisations: in Chinese literature we have the writings of Confucius and Sun Tzu; in Japanese we have the *War Tales* (*gunki monogatari*) and in Sanskrit we have the *Rig Veda* and *The Bhagavad Gita*, which provide detailed discourses on the meaning, purposes, and uses of war and ways to achieve peace. It seems that this condition of human existence (i.e., being violent and at war) has been with humanity from very early and this has been recorded in most (if not all) literary, historical, and theological writings (examples of early theological writings discussing the conditions and morality of war are the Books of *Joshua*, *Kings*, and *Chronicles* in Hebrew scriptures).

Mapping current debates on the Philosophy and Ethics of War seems a difficult task, taking into consideration the proliferation of theories and perspectives. It is widely accepted that the two extreme (and less popular) positions in these debates are pacifism and realism. Pacifism seems unrealistic to most, and some moral philosophers and theologians have even claimed that it is morally wrong. Its commitment to peace and opposition to war leaves unresolved issues in relation to the causes for armed conflict found in ongoing social and political justice disputes; these issues sometimes are even further exacerbated during armed conflicts or after these have ended.² Pacifism is seen as means of establishing injustices and to further consolidate a morally wrong *status quo* (see for example the invasion of Cyprus by the Turkish Army in 1974 and the unresolved conflicts that the UN-backed attempts to end this war have created until now). Some philosophers and theologians have actually claimed that pacifism produces a vision of our material world where salvation becomes superfluous or obsolete (some may even claim that in this way pacifism is quite challenging to theologically minded people).³ Realism on the other hand is regarded as equally extreme: with its insistence on the competitive and conflictual aspects of politics and violence that it promotes, it makes it rather difficult to achieve any long-lasting peace; it is a vision of society and politics in which a Machiavellian perception of human society as a

² Fiala, Andrew, 2023, 'Pacifism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pacifism> (accessed 20/07/2024).

³ Anscombe, G.E.M., 1981. 'War and Murder' in *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

jungle prevails and where traditional morality is meaningless.⁴ If we are to identify where the majority of today's debates move, we would have to recognise that they lie within the spectrum of the Just War Theory arguments, which are used from both sides in an armed conflict to justify equally unjustified actions, such as killing civilians and prisoners of war, bombing hospitals and destroying infrastructure (note that all of these actions are condemned by established *Jus in Bello* rules, cited in the Geneva Conventions and the UN Protocols on War). Before we embark on our investigation into key problems in these debates, it is important to discuss some key distinctions between the main terms: *Just War Tradition* (JWTr) and *Just War Theory* (JWTh).

By *Just War Tradition*, we usually mean the moral theory, principles, and rules on what constitutes morally justified and morally acceptable warfare. The JWTr has a long history and has culminated into some sharply defined rules of war, collectively defined and systematically expressed in modern times in the form of the Geneva Conventions. Today, we can say that the Geneva Conventions and the UN Protocols on War contain the essentials of this Just War Tradition. Examples of prescriptions found in these documents are the protection of hospitals, civilians, prisoners of war, and children during war.

By *Just War Theory*, we usually mean a philosophical approach to moral problems in war, which, even though based on JWTr, sometimes goes beyond and outside its prescriptions. There is a wide spectrum of philosophical positions on Just War. It is not rare to see Just War Theorists going against the established rules of Just War Tradition. They consider the justifiability and ethics of war and killing within given contexts (sometimes rather complex) and conclude that there are occasions when it may be justified to go against the rules of war accepted by the JWTr. Most of the philosophers who debate moral issues of war have either JWTr or JWTh inclinations (or both). But there is a smaller group of philosophers who prefer to be Realists about war (i.e., that war is an unavoidable fact of the human condition) and either accept some of the JWTh in specific contexts (a route that they believe serves their interests, as in the case of Contingent Realists), or absolutely reject both JWTr and JWTh as naïve and morally wrong (because they

⁴ Korab-Karpowicz, W. J., 2023, 'Political Realism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/> (accessed 20/07/2024).

consider moral rules as hindering social progress and the consolidation of human power, as in the case of Absolute Realists). There is also another small group of moral philosophers who are Pacifists (i.e., they reject war and violence as a way to solve conflicts and social/political problems); here we have the division between Contingent Pacifists (who accept that sometimes war is necessary and thus, rules of war are necessary, for example in cases of defending one's country, and, in this case, they will accept JWTr or JWTh considerations) and Absolute Pacifists (who absolutely reject all war and violence in all its forms even in cases of defending one's country, and they usually support forms of non-violent active or passive resistance).

Christian philosophers and theologians through the centuries have chosen one or more from the above outlined spectrum of relevant philosophical positions. The more radical have chosen to be either Realists or Pacifists, and the less radical have chosen to follow theories within the JWTr.: Augustine's and Aquinas' writings are two of the most widely cited Christian discussions of rules of war in medieval and early modern times, and are still studied by most JWTr theorists.. However, a common element in both Christian and non-Christian debates on the morality of war is that there is no single moral theory or perspective that can help us deal with all the complex problems that arise in armed conflicts. There have been many solutions that have been proposed (consequentialist and/or non-consequentialist in nature), but none successful enough to form the basis of a common solution to the problem of war.

Note that the above mapping of positions and distinctions is one of many possible attempts to map the territory covered by Ethical Theories of War. I provide it here to enable the reader to follow my argument. My classification of relevant theories outlined above differs significantly from Lazar⁵ and Orend⁶. Note, however, that Lazar's article on 'War' at the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP 2016) differs significantly in terms of the provided distinctions from Orend's earlier article on 'War' at the same authoritative online philosophical resource (SEP 2005)

⁵ Lazar, Seth, 2016, 'War', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/> (accessed 12/07/24).

⁶ Orend, Brian, 2005, 'War', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/war/> (accessed 12/07/24)

without providing any justification for this difference in approach. I do not believe that this is by accident. The careful reader in philosophical bibliography will find a number of similar attempts to classify and re-classify important philosophical positions on war into ‘friends and foes’ accordingly. For example, in my case, I differ significantly from both Lazar and Orend, because I reject their classification of Walzer (a key representative of JWTh) and his rather controversial positions (they think that he should be classified as a JWTr theorist, while I reject this claim with reasons that I discuss below). I will discuss more on this in what follows. I will start my discussion of the current state and value of moral theories of war with one of the key problems in JWTh.

*Are Jus ad Bellum (JaB) and Jus in Bello (JiB)
morally distinct, autonomous, or inter-dependent?*

One of the key problems in contemporary JWTh is the question of whether *Jus ad Bellum* (moral law that relates to morally permissible ways to start a war) is inter-dependent or related in some morally causal way to *Jus in Bello* (moral law that relates to the conduct of war). This issue is very important because it determines the moral value of actions in times of war. Famous examples that moral philosophers and ethicists have discussed at great length are the following:

- i. Is the Nazi General Rommel morally praiseworthy for refusing to comply with the Commando Order? The Commando Order (in German: *Kommandobefehl*) was issued by the high command of the German Armed Forces, on 18 October 1942, basically ordering German soldiers to execute Allied soldiers caught behind lines of defence. This is a key question, because if JaB and JiB are interdependent and the one gains or loses moral value on the moral determination of the other, then no matter what Rommel does, he will always be morally wrong. As a high ranking officer of the Army in the Nazi regime, he will always be morally responsible for the atrocities of the Nazis and for his support to this regime by taking an active part in its survival. If there is a sharp distinction between JaB and JiB and the two are distinct moral entities, then Rommel is morally praiseworthy for keeping JiB in this instance regarding prisoners of war (this

kind of deliberation supports the thesis of the Moral Equality of Combatants or MEC).

ii. Is a state morally allowed to harm civilians and break any other rules within JiB, if it fights for its defence and survival? This situation, which has been characterised in moral debates as a 'supreme emergency' is characteristic of the moral nature of the debates within the contemporary JWTh. Again, here the issue of moral interdependency between JaB and JiB shows up in a rather pertinent way: if they are not morally inter-dependent, then a state can be morally just in terms of JaB and morally unjust in terms of JiB. If they are morally inter-dependent, then moral value in terms of JaB changes the perceived moral value of certain actions that would be condemned by JWTr rules regarding JiB. Some (among whom I classify Walzer) may even claim that as long as a state is morally just in terms of JaB, it can override, bend, or nullify the power of certain JiB rules, such as, for example, proportionality of force, harming civilians, and destroying infrastructure, bombing hospitals and other such JiB rules.

Let us see in more detail why these examples of the problem of inter-dependency of JaB and JiB provide serious and insurmountable challenges for the moral intuitions of both contemporary philosophers (who currently engage in JWTh) and for the philosophers who proposed this differentiation between rules of war centuries ago. In the case of General Rommel (a characteristic example used to support MEC), a contemporary philosopher, Michael Walzer (who for Lazar, in his 2016 SEP article, is classified as a philosopher who follows JWTr, while for others, Walzer only follows JWTh) claims that Rommel should be recognised with moral worth when it comes to his disobedience regarding the Commando Order because: 'The reason has to do with the distinction of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. We draw a line between the war itself, for which soldiers are not responsible, and the conduct of the war, for which they are responsible, at least within their own sphere of activity. Generals may well straddle the line, but that only suggests that we know pretty well where it should be drawn. We draw it by

recognizing the nature of political obedience'.⁷ This is an extraordinary remark for someone who wishes to be regarded as a follower of JWTr, taking into account that, as Walzer himself acknowledges, the opinion of the Chief British Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials was that 'The killing of combatants is justifiable ... only where the war itself is legal'.⁸

The Chief British Prosecutor based this decision on the Geneva Conventions and other long established international treaties on war (which form the core of what today we consider to be JWTr), and here Walzer seems to be going against some basic moral intuitions expressed in these JWTr documents. By appealing to the distinction between JaB and JiB to justify the moral behaviour of agents who, in JWTr terms, would be considered immoral, Walzer actually shows not only how poor is the very idea of the distinction itself, but also that he does not hesitate to commit himself to moral intuitions that go against established norms of JWTr. Furthermore, some ethicists have criticised Walzer's assumption that all soldiers are the same in terms of their moral status.

Walzer supports this idea (the moral equality of combatants or MEC), by claiming that they have the same moral status because of their mutual consent to be harmed: when combatants fight freely, choosing one another as enemies, they lose their rights of life and liberty by carrying arms and being soldiers.⁹ Some, for example, have highlighted that a soldier may be a conscript or a volunteer or a professional, and they should be differentiated in terms of their moral status as a result of this. Some other ethicists have attacked Walzer for refusing to admit the significant moral difference between soldiers who follow the orders of an immoral chain of command (for example coming from an invading army) and soldiers who defend themselves or their country. In the second case, the soldiers do not lose their rights of life and liberty, because others (the attacking army) are morally to blame for the use of weapons to defend themselves (in Walzer's own words: 'People don't lose moral rights by justifiably defending themselves or other innocent people against unjust attack').¹⁰ So, we can see from the

⁷ Walzer, M. (1977) *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, New York, Basic Books., pp. 39-40.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Walzer, *ibid.*, p. 37; 136; 145.

¹⁰ McMahan, J. (2006) 'On the moral equality of combatants', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 377-82.

above discussion that the sharp and clear distinction between JaB and JiB, which provides the foundation and supports the MEC, is bringing us into a moral trap that exists only for the justification of the attackers and invaders and not for the acknowledgement of the superior moral status of the defenders.

If we investigate further into the discussion of Supreme Emergencies, we will see that we have similar results. One of the most often cited examples to support the view that we can reduce or eradicate the moral value of JiB rules (when compared to JaB) is Bomber Harris. Walzer describes the state of 'supreme emergency' (that allowed Bomber Harris and his colleagues to bomb Dresden and other cities with thousands of losses in civilian's lives) like this: 'Churchill's description of Britain's predicament in 1939 as a "supreme emergency" was a piece of rhetorical heightening designed to overcome that resistance. But the phrase also contains an argument: that there is a fear beyond the ordinary fearfulness (and the frantic opportunism) of war, and a danger to which that fear corresponds, and that this fear and danger may well require exactly those measures that the war convention bars. Now, a great deal is at stake here, both for the men and women driven to adopt such measures and for their victims, so we must attend carefully to the implicit argument of "supreme emergency"'.¹¹

Walzer identifies two conditions that constitute a 'supreme emergency': danger for the very existence of a political community (e.g., there is a serious threat for the existence of a state, nation, or race) and the imminence of threat or urgency for the decision that needs to be taken (ibid). He examines in detail Churchill's decisions in 1942 (and after) regarding the bombing of German cities and he finds that most of them were taken under the supreme emergency considerations and justifiably so. However, Walzer does acknowledge that Churchill reconsidered his argument (after the Dresden bombings and the general outcry against him that his decision caused) with these words (which Walzer cites in his work): 'The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing'.¹²

So, what do we make of the supreme emergency considerations? One serious criticism against Walzer here is that he applies utilitarian

¹¹ Walzer, 1977, p.251.

¹² Walzer, ibid, p.253.

considerations to reduce the moral worth of non-utilitarian moral rules and principles (JiB). Coady, for example, highlights the fact that Walzer's supreme emergency considerations have a pro-state bias, making any struggles for independence and/or freedom fighters' organisations immoral.¹³ Are numbers or systemic considerations for a political community that guarantee the representation of people in cases such as these morally important? If they are not (as many theorists believe), Coady finds that Walzer's supreme emergency considerations are unjustified.¹⁴ Also, any attempt from Walzer to compromise his theory and reduce the effect or impact of his pro-state bias is doomed to failure, because it will make his theory lose its appeal regarding the rarity application that Walzer considers its most important asset (it can be used by almost any political organisation when pushed against the wall). So, Walzer does not seem to have any strong support for his deviation from the JWTr, making his theory to be more a 'free for all' JWTh (a chimeran hybrid of rights-based theory with act-utilitarian tendencies, a pinnacle of inconsistency and self-contradiction).

From the above discussion of serious problems regarding the distinction between JaB and JiB or the interdependence of the two terms, we see a dead-end for a possible moral consensus of ethicists (especially in how this is used in the theory of one of the key current moral philosophers of war). It seems that the very distinction between JaB and JiB and its application has to answer serious unresolvable challenges. Note that in the case of Walzer, we have a moral philosopher, who, in his attempt to accept the distinction while at the same time advising and supporting USA and Israeli governments on battle tactics on the ground (according to one of his many critics)¹⁵, has to admit logical contradictions in his arguments. Walzer believes in the sharp and clear distinction between JaB and JiB; he calls them 'logically independent'.¹⁶ He also strongly believes in the benefit of having this distinction in the determination of the moral worth of actions during war (being a supporter of MEC). However, in his support of supreme

¹³ Coady, C.A.J. (2004) 'Terrorism, morality, and supreme emergency', *Ethics*, vol. 114, no. 4, pp. 782–8.

¹⁴ Coady, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Slater, Jerome, 2024, 'On Michael Walzer, Gaza, and the Lebanon War: An attack on Michael Walzer's position on the Lebanon War', *Dissent*, Spring 2024, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/on-michael-walzer-gaza-and-the-lebanon-war/> (accessed 20/07/2024).

¹⁶ Walzer, 1977, p. 21.

emergencies, he seems to go beyond and outside the recommendations of this distinction and actually recommend the cancellation and moral invalidation of JiB rules.

So, it seems reasonable to suggest here that the very distinction between JaB and JiB is not helpful (at least today) for any major contribution to the current moral debates and seems to hinder us in the clear determination of the moral worth of specific moral actions during war. I am neither the first nor the only one to indicate this. There is already some discussion about who actually admitted this distinction (between JaB and JiB) in its modern form, to what purpose, and whether indeed it is still useful (see for example the relevant work of Wheeler and Deshman).¹⁷

What the above investigation indicates is a serious problem not only with JWTh, but with most current moral theory in relation to war. Main theories in the ethics of war (moving within the current JWTh framework) are unable to provide satisfying and acceptable answers to the moral problems of war. It seems that theories that provide deeper and more meaningful solutions to the problems at hand are needed. Outside the popular domain of JWTh and JWTr, the situation is not that different. Most moral theories of pacifism are problematic because they fail to provide a realistic answer to the realism of war, causing unresolved conflicts to fester and failing to address the causes of war, providing fuel for wider conflicts and wars later on (a good example of this Contingent Pacifist approach of the UN is the continuing unlawful occupation of more than a third of the island of Cyprus by the Turkish Army, which for fifty years now is still dividing people, depriving them of basic human rights and causing animosity between the communities on the island). Realists on the other hand fail to accept and support any possible vision of peace, perpetually feeding the desires of warmongers and warlords. It seems that Morality and Ethics are unable to help us with their tools and concepts to deal effectively with the challenge of war and violence.

¹⁷ Weiler, J.H.H., and Deshman, Abby, 2013, 'Far Be It from Thee to Slay the Righteous with the Wicked: An Historical and Historiographical Sketch of the Bellicose Debate Concerning the Distinction between Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello', *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 24 no. 1, pp.25–61.

I would like to outline here a possible and more plausible alternative: A more profound Ontological and Holistic answer provided in the writings of the late Byzantine philosopher and theologian who is recognised as a saint by the Orthodox Church: St Gregorios Palamas (1296–1357).

*Hesychastic Askesis and Palamas:
Palamas on Peace and on the root of all violence.*

With our brief examination of key perspectives in the philosophy and ethics of war, we have concluded that a more ontological and holistic perspective is needed, which will take into consideration all factors affecting human volition addressing the root and cause of violence and war, and will be able to transform both individuals and societies. This perspective needs to be *ontological* because it needs to focus on the existence of what actually and really influences human will. A simple metaphysical excursion into what might be considered as affecting human will cannot be successful here, because it may lead us into the extremes of pacifism and realism and their insurmountable problems. In my previous research work, I have outlined why I believe that metaphysics is a poor guide for ethics. In order to engage in a meaningful way with an ethical discourse, we need to go into the realm of ontology, not just metaphysics.¹⁸ This perspective also needs

¹⁸ See Athanasopoulos, C., 2018, 'Eudaimonia, Apatheia, Ataraxia and Hesychasm: How St Gregory Palamas' views on hesychasm and asceticism solve the problems in the often misunderstood ancient Greek moral concepts of eudaimonia, apatheia and ataraxia', *Analogia: The Pemptousia Journal for Theological Studies*, Vol.5, pp.5–18; Athanasopoulos, C., 2020, 'Hesychia, Salvation, Ineffability and Quietude: St Gregory Palamas and L. Wittgenstein on the Escapist and Futile Misconceptions of Ontological Salvation and Metaphysical Hinges', in C. Athanasopoulos, ed., *Orthodox Mysticism and Asceticism: Philosophy and Theology in St Gregory Palamas' Work*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.52–85; Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2013, 'St. Gregory Palamas, (Neo-)Platonist and Aristotelian Metaphysics: the response of Orthodox Mystical Theology to the Western impasse of intellectualism and essentialism' in *Divine Essence and Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy*, edited by C. Athanasopoulos and C. Schneider, 2013, James Clarke & Co, pp.50–67. Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2006, 'The Ethical Problems of Sensus Communis Philosophicus: Reflections on McKeon' in Stephan Heuser, Hans G. Ulrich, eds., *Pluralism in Europe- One Law, One Market, One Culture?* Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006, pp.278–289; Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2004, 'The influence of Ps.Dionysius the Areopagite on Johannes Scotus Eriugena and St. Gregory Palamas: Goodness as Transcendence of Metaphysics', in Agnieszka Kijewska, ed., *Being or Good? Metamorphoses of Neoplatonism*, Lublin: Catholic University of Lublin Press (KUL), 2004, pp.319–341; Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2002, 'Scholastic and Byzantine Realism: Absolutism in the Metaphysics and Ethics of Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham and the critique of St. Gregory Palamas', (in English), in the international philosophy journal *Verbum* (the official Journal of

to be *holistic* (i.e., addressing human beings as a unified whole, with a variety of capacities and powers), because partial attempts that focus on intellectualistic discussions to embed human perceptions of justice within rules of war are doomed to failure, as we have demonstrated in the case of the relationship of JaB and JiB and their shortcomings, with specific examples from current JWTh (and our own previous work).¹⁹

When we start looking at examples of how Orthodox Christian saints with a hesychastic outlook on life see and understand war and violence, we can establish the basic principles for such an ontological and holistic perspective on war and violence. I will support my investigation here with an analysis of a specific text from the works of St Gregory Palamas. The basics of my approach originate in my prior work on the ontological, holistic, and ethical aspects of Palamas' Orthodox hesychastic philosophy and theology.²⁰

In his first Homily dedicated to Peace ("First Homily: On Peace between us and others"; *Ομιλία Α', Περί της προς αλλήλους ειρήνης*, PG 151, 16D), which he preached on the third day after his entry to Thessaloniki as its Archbishop, we see Palamas making a detailed analysis of the causes of violence and war and how best to eradicate them. The context of this Homily is particularly important: There were riots and civic unrest in Thessaloniki shortly before Palamas' arrival. The Zealots, who were behind this unrest, sought (unsuccessfully) to befriend and receive the support of Palamas to their cause before his arrival.²¹ Palamas wrote and delivered this homily as a response to the climate of violence and fear that prevailed in Thessaloniki at the time (the Zealots were an active and strong political force in Thessaloniki

the Institute of Medieval Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, University of St. Petersburg, Russia), Vol. 6, Volume Topic: Aristotle in Medieval Metaphysics, January 2002, pp.154–165; Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2000a, 'Good and Evil in Human Nature', in *Philosophical Inquiry: International Quarterly*, Vol.22, No.3, pp.104–15; Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2000b, 'Natural Law in Ancient Greek and Modern Philosophy: The Case for Ontology', in *Skepsis: A Journal for Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research*, 2000, Vol. XI, pp. 153–158. Most of these works can be found at the Palamas Seminar Wiki (<http://palamas-seminar-neamt.wikidot.com/athanasopoulos>) and the Palamas Seminar repository: https://archive.org/details/@gregory_palamas/uploads

¹⁹ See Athanasopoulos 2006; Athanasopoulos 2004; Athanasopoulos 2002; Athanasopoulos, 2000b.

²⁰ See for example Athanasopoulos 2018; Athanasopoulos 2020.

²¹ Μεταλληνός, π. Γεώργιος, 1995, 'Ησυχαστές και Ζηλωτές. Πνευματική ακμή και κοινωνική κρίση στον βυζαντινό 14ο αιώνα', στου ιδίου, *Ελληνισμός Μαχόμενος*, εκδ. Τήνος, Αθήνα 1995, σσ. 13–40.

between 1342 and 1349, a particularly troublesome period in the Byzantine Empire, causing the slaughter of nobility in Thessaloniki and a destruction of property and infrastructure).

Palamas starts first outlining the theological and ontological basis of what he will suggest as a remedy later on in his Homily (a familiar Patristic strategy). He highlights the fact that we are all created by one Lord, one Creator, and one Father, which makes us related as brothers (and sisters) to all other humans and that this also makes us related to other parts of creation, including non-sentient existences. Note that the commonality of sharing our existence with all other living and non-sentient beings on our planet, making it our communal home, is undisputed even by today's atheists. He also stresses a core Christian belief that only humans have the image of God (and the possibility to be like God via the likeness) and this through the common genealogy via Adam. Finally, he emphasises that we are all related as brothers and sisters via the Holy Church, of which Jesus Christ is the Leader and its Perfection, who is also our brother, because he asked us to call God 'Our Father' (in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9–13), and who is also making us parts of the same body, his body, that is the Church. He also explains that it is one and the same baptismal font that allowed us to be born again in Christ and activate the gifts of the Holy Spirit (*Ἐν οὖν ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ἀδελφοί τό τῆς παλιγγενεσίας καί θεογενεσίας λουτρόν*). He stresses that it is one faith, one hope, one God for all and through all, God gathering all humans through his Love and making us members of others' bodies and members of his body (*μία πίστις, μία ἐλπίς, εἷς Θεός ἐπὶ πάντων, καί διὰ πάντων, καί ἐν πᾶσιν ἡμῖν, συνάγων ἡμᾶς εἰς ἑαυτόν δι' ἀγάπης ἐνθέου καί μέλη ποιῶν ἀλλήλων καί ἑαυτοῦ*).

After this short introduction about the ontological and theological unity of all humans, Palamas identifies the root of all violence and war in the gradual eradication of love within our hearts and the gradual infiltration of hatred in it with the help of the Evil one (*τῇ συνεργείᾳ τοῦ πονηροῦ*). Through a repetition of this process of elimination of love in our hearts, gradually, all love for other human beings, but also for God, is eliminated, paralysing all links and relations between the members of the city, the beings (sentient and non-sentient) in wider inhabited areas, and finally the world as a whole. Through this gradual process of alienation, war seems inevitable and through the confusion

that this process brings, it turns relatives and people of the same city and country against each other and against others from other lands, causing them to commit unheard of ruthless acts, weakening the strength and unity of people and turning them into floating items in the sea (i.e., without rationality) being brought forth and back by tidal waves (i.e., their emotions, instincts and other non-rational powers). Palamas at this point refers to the civic unrest and riots that took place in Thessaloniki before his arrival, calling them ‘thuggish acts’ (*ἀλιττηριώδους στάσεως*) that seem to be without any valid explanation and plausible cause (i.e., resembling the movement of floating items in sea, being moved aimlessly by tidal waves).

He concludes his preliminary analysis by indicating that all this seems to be like a disease that paralyses the city and destroys all civic connections, referring to the paralytics described in the Gospels. Palamas further calls this unrest a worse medical condition than paralysis, because the evil acts committed under the influence of this disease are far worse (morally) than an inability to move described in the Gospel’s paralytics cases (e.g., Mark 2: 1–12). He asks his audience to think about the cause of this disease and seek the medication and treatment that can be provided only by God.

He provides a parallel analysis at this point of the cause of the disease of the paralytics in their sin (...*τό αἴτιον; Ἡ ἀμαρτία*). In the pathology of this disease (i.e., war and violence), the prognosis is the same as in the case of the paralytics: as sin drove out health in the case of the paralytics, so it is in the case of violent conflict: sin is what drives away love, gradually turning our heart cold, producing a necrosis of its sensitivities, causing a particularly strong resistance to place oneself under the grace and guidance of God (...*ψυγείσης δέ τῆς ἀγάπης τελείως, τήν τοῦ Θεοῦ χάριν καί κηδεμονίαν παραμένει ἀδύνατον*). Through Biblical parallelisms and analogies, Palamas urges his flock to never think about doing evil, never return evildoing to evildoing and to always defeat evil through good acts. It is only in this way that humans can resist the Devil’s plan, who manically tries to establish himself in the hearts of the warring parties, turning them into beasts and making them similar to the Devil and his demons, killing humans, hating humans and opposing Christ (*Καί οὕτως ἀνθρωποκτόνον τόν ἄνθρωπον ὁ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀνθρωποκτόνος καί μισάνθρωπος ἀπεργάζεται*

καί τῷ ζωοδότῃ Χριστῷ ἀντικείμενον...'). Next, through many Biblical references from the Gospels and the Psalms, Palamas proves that not only Jesus cancelled all animosity among people with His Cross but also sent his disciples to spread the message of the Gospels, which is the message of Peace. The Apostles not only lived the message of peace themselves, but they also begin many of their Epistles with the message of peace, spreading peace and providing peace as the foundation of all local churches. Palamas also reminds his flock that Paul's message in his Epistles is that all Christians should pursue peace for all people, because without this peace they cannot be holy and cannot see God. '...μετά Παύλου πρὸς ἡμᾶς λέγομεν· «εἰρήνην διώκετε μετὰ πάντων καί τῶν ἁγιασμόν ἧς χωρίς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τόν Κύριον»'.

So, if we would like to summarise in a few words the message of Palamas, we could highlight the following key points:

- War and violent conflict are caused by a disease (with symptoms that affect humans *holistically*, i.e., affecting their whole existence, physical, mental, spiritual). This disease turns humans into entities that are worse than beasts, being ruled by uncontrollable passions, making them instruments of the Devil, hating both humans and God. This disease consists in the disintegration of our personhood: rational powers are weakened, the heart loses its sensitivity and ability to love, there is no control of one's volitional powers, and a transformation into an inert being by materiality and the will of the flesh.
- This disease is caused by sin. Its effect on the heart and the soul of humans is gradual and it makes the human heart cold, losing the sensibilities and special grace that was given through the act of Creation (image and likeness of God) and renewed through their Baptism.
- This disease is not rational, so its treatment and the eradication of its causes cannot depend on rational means (including rationality-based ethics and moral philosophy). Once within the realm of this disease, we need to transform the volitional and other powers of the soul and the heart in a *holistic* way to reverse its progress and the consumption of our very essence as human beings. In the way that Palamas approaches this

issue, one is reminded of Paul's admonition to Christians to guard their minds and hearts within God's peace that goes beyond all thought 'ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ' (Φιλιπ. 4,7).

- There is no possibility of cure from this disease unless we turn to God and completely surrender ourselves to his mercy. No half measures are allowed, and one cannot postpone the inevitable.
- The Devil is in control of all those who suffer from the disease. As no cure and no escape from the disease is possible, the disease gains its own spiralling dynamic and effect on societies, spreading like a virus.
- The treatment for the disease depends on specific things we can do and specific things God does. There has to be a co-operation (*συνέργεια*) that needs to be maintained continuously for an effective treatment. The first step needs to be done by us, humans, through a conscious and volition-based decision to do good, when confronted by violence and war. Materiality, love of the flesh, avarice, ambition, pride, and riches are to be avoided (see also Γρηγορίου Παλαμά, *Ομιλία ιγ'*, *Πέμπτης Κυριακῆς των Νηστειῶν*, PG 151, 161C-165B). Dedication to ceaseless prayer, constant *askesis* and fasting is to be pursued.
- The maintenance of health (i.e., peace in the heart and in social relations), after one establishes this kind of radical treatment of the disease of war and violence, is a continuous struggle in becoming one *holistically* and *ontologically* with the Church and God.
- This diagnosis and prognosis of the disease of war and violence can be found not only in the Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles, but also in the writings of the Church Fathers, who stress that the Church through its mysteries and the opportunity for true worship and dedication to God that it provides becomes a temple and sanctuary of peace. For example, St John's Chrysostom insists that the Divine Liturgy is the mystery of peace (*Commentary on St Matthew the Evangelist*,

50; PG 58, 508). People with interior conflicts and ruled by passions cannot establish peace in the world. Early Fathers of the Church stress that outer peace cannot be established without first establishing inner peace. Only people who are masters in this inner warfare and have established peace within themselves can help in bringing peace in the world. St Isaac the Syrian connects peace directly with humility, inner peace with outer peace, and peace with hope in God (Homily 51).²² We also have the example of many early saints who, after reaching greatness in humility and love for Christ, they became great peace makers.²³

- The recommended treatment for this disease is dependent on a gradual ontological and holistic transformation of our volitional and spiritual powers: at the start of this process, the outer battle and war needs to be turned into a continuous interior battle and war between the spirit and the flesh; gradually, and sometimes in very small stages of development, this inner war will subside and inner peace will be achieved. Palamas, in one of his Homilies (Homily 58) notes that there must be a continuous effort to control our thoughts and volition and distance them from all materiality, so as to effect peace within our heart and, in this way, bring about peace in the world, following here the recommendations of St Isaac the Syrian and other early Church Fathers. The analysis of the recommended treatment for this disease here reminds us other works of Palamas; we can bring into our minds here not only the chief hesychastic works of St Gregory Palamas (mainly his *Triads* - *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζόντων*; *The life of St Peter the Athonite*- *Εἰς τον βίον του οσίου Πέτρου του εν Ἀθῶ*; his *Letter to Nun Xenia* and his *Homilies on the Theotokos*) but also the writings of earlier Church Fathers, like St Macarius of Egypt, who insists that, when in prayer and in conscious effort to approach God, we need to be in peace, stillness (*ησυχία*), full

²² Miller, D., 1984, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Holy Transfiguration Monastery: Boston, pp. 243–248.

²³ See for example the life of St Daniel Stylites in Συμεών Μεταφραστής, *Βίος Οσίου Δανιήλ Στυλῖτου*, ΛΑ, PG 116; 1008B.

attentiveness (προσοχή), repentant heart (νήφουσιν καρδίαν), and intense pain for our fallen nature (PG 34, 517). St John of the Ladder discusses this in relation to anger, which he insists is incompatible with a spirit of peace (Λόγος Ὁγδοός, *Περὶ Αοργησίας καὶ Πραότητος*, 16). This is also related to what most of the texts in the *Philokalia* are describing and prescribing (see Vol. 1, St Cassian the Roman, *Περὶ τῶν οχτῶ λογισμῶν τῆς κακίας*: Λόγος 4- Περὶ τῆς οργῆς; further references one can find in Kallistos Angelikoudes and Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopouloi). Some of the details of this lengthy process also can be found in St Nikodemus the Hagiorite text *Unseen Warfare* (Αόρατος Πόλεμος); I have discussed the *Philokalia* texts and St Nikodemus' famous text in particular, which has nothing to do with similar manuals in the West, in recent works).²⁴ Note that I elaborate on the close connection and many links between the texts of the *Philokalia* and the texts of St Gregory Palamas in other works.²⁵

An obvious question, however, still remains for the researcher into Palamas' hesychastic perspective: would Palamas approve the use of military force or violence of any kind, even for only defensive purposes? One could even highlight here the friendship between Ioannis Kantakouzinus and Palamas. Was Palamas just supporting Kantakouzinus with his Homily on Peace? This suggestion for some commentators has a basis due to the fact that the Zealots opposed Kantakouzinus. But suppose he tried to support Kantakouzinus with his Homilies. If he did, then why did Palamas not support Kantakouzinus in his wars? Kantakouzinus had to face particular political problems for his survival (the Zealots in Thessaloniki were just one of his many adversaries). Why did Palamas not openly support Kantakouzinus in his violent efforts (for example by preaching for a holy war like the

²⁴ Athanasopoulos, Constantinos, 2021, 'The Philosophy of Philokalia: The Culture and Life of Beauty in the East', *Annals of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest*, Topic: The Philosophy of Philokalia, Vol 70, No 1, pp.13–71: <https://annals.filosofie.unibuc.ro/index.php/annals/article/view/325/318> ; see also "Philokalia and St Gregory Palamas: An Introduction" in Summares, M. and Ricardo Barroso Batista (Eds.), *Theology and the Philosophy of Philokalia: Its Reception East and West*, Orthodox Ways: St Gregory Palamas Chapel Publications -Saint Gregory Palamas Study Center – Monsul, 2022, ISBN 978-9-72697-347-8 (ebk), ISBN-10 972-6-97347-3 (ebk), pp. 3-62. <https://archive.org/details/athanasopoulos-philokalia-portugal>

²⁵ Athanasopoulos 2021 and Athanasopoulos 2022.

Pope did with the Crusades? Here the careful reader of Palamas texts would note the otherworldly character of his discourse. How would hesychasm be compatible to a particular political or military agenda?

Setting aside the historical particularities, the question gains a particular theological importance because the Fathers of the Church do seem to allow a limited use of force: most notable here is St Basil the Great who in his Canon 13 of the 92 Canons admits this: 'Our fathers did not consider killings committed in the course of wars to be classifiable as murders at all, on the score, it seems to me, of allowing a pardon to men fighting in defence of sobriety and piety. Perhaps, though, it might be advisable to refuse them communion for three years, on the ground that their hands are not clean'. (Basil. Ep. 188. 13; see also *Pedalion* p. 801). It is important to note that St Basil here does admit that when men fight in defence of sobriety and piety, it can be pardoned. There is also additional evidence that even at the times of the Apostles, the faithful who were engaged in war could not become members of the clergy, but laymen could receive the mysteries after some time of penance (see here Canons of Hippolytus 14.74, and Apostolic Canon 66). But note that this approach of the Fathers has nothing to do with the Augustinian or Aquinian approach to war. There is still a recognition that engaging in violence is a sin and should be avoided and that penance and a certain time for this penance to have a lasting effect on the heart is required even for laymen approaching the Mystery of Holy Communion.

However, from the above analysis and summary of Palamas' perspective on war, it is obvious, that, for Palamite hesychasm in particular, there would be no allowance for taking arms in a military conflict and no allowance for violently relating with other human beings in any way or form (even for defensive reasons). The hesychasts would be dedicated to prayer and would try to bring peace in the world through the achievement of inner peace in their heart. They might intervene through their intercessions and prayers and (if they received an indication from God that this would be fruitful) would try to bring the warring parties together so that they can arrive at a solution to their problem peacefully and establish peace in this way. This agrees with the views of many contemporary saints who followed hesychasm in their lives: According to St Silouan the Athonite: 'If the kings and rulers of the nations knew the love of God, they would never make war.

War happens to us for our sins, not because of our love.... If those in high places kept the commandments of the Lord, and we obeyed them in humility, there would be great peace and gladness on earth, whereas now the whole universe suffers because of the ambition for power and absence of submission among the proud.²⁶

Political Hesychasm: A Contradiction in Terms?

Fr John Meyendorff has had a great influence not only on interpretations of Palamas and other Church Fathers but also on contemporary Orthodox Theology. A key point of influence that we will investigate here is regarding the term of ‘political hesychasm’, which has been influential in the debates regarding the recent war in Ukraine. There is strong evidence that through the works of Fr John Meyendorff the term ‘political hesychasm’ has been introduced in the scholarship related to Palamas and hesychasm. Meyendorff believed that during Byzantine times, the Byzantines achieved a peculiar synthesis (a *symfonia*) between the state and ecclesiastical power that allowed a more nuanced relationship between civic and ecclesiastical duties and responsibilities.²⁷ In his work *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (1984), Meyendorff proposes a peculiar thesis in relation to the related developments in Russia: through consistent and systematic interventions from a line of Ecumenical Patriarchs influenced by ‘Athonite hesychasm’, the idea of a Byzantine Orthodox commonwealth (*οικουμένη*) somehow took hold in Russia and influenced the attempts at a unification of All Russia. Key Ecumenical Patriarchs in this move were Athanasius (1289–1293, 1303–1339), Philotheos Kokkinos (1353–1354, 1364–1376), and Anthony IV (1389–1390, 1391–1397), who used canon 28 of Chalcedon and canon 34 of the Holy Apostles in a variety of ways. They promoted, favoured, or influenced ecclesiastical affairs in Russia in such a way as to have a more centralised ecclesiastical administration, which went in parallel

²⁶ Archimandite Sophrony, 1991, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, Essex: Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, p.319.

²⁷ John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983; pp. 225–9.

with political developments during that time for a more centralised political government of All Russia.

For example, Meyendorff describes Patriarch Anthony IV, who, in his letter of 1393 to Grand Duke Basil I of Muscovy, specifically mentions that Christians not only need to pray for the Church but also for the emperor, above all other princes (including the princes of Russia). Meyendorff tries to support this thesis through other historical examples, such as the recognition of the Metropolitan of Kiev as Patriarch Job of Moscow in 1589 by Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremias II (c.1530–1595). This thesis has influenced a large group of Orthodox theologians and historians in claiming that there has been a distinct move organised by followers of ‘Orthodox hesychasm’ and Palamas in pushing forward specific ecclesiastical and political agendas.

Perhaps one of the most important contemporary Greek philosophers, theologians, and cultural critics who has developed and supported further the use of this term is Professor Christos Yannaras. Yannaras has proposed a unique interpretation of many aspects of Orthodox theology and culture leading many to call his work and attitudes ‘Neo-Orthodox’. Yannaras has influenced many in Greece and, through the translations of his work into many different languages, a growing number of scholars in both the West and the East. His work has been criticised by many monks in Holy Mt Athos, with Theokletos Dionysiates claiming that Yannaras’s ideas were very close to a heresy (Neo-Nicolaitism).²⁸ In relation to this, it is worthwhile mentioning that, in one of my previous works, I (among many lay scholars) have criticised Yannaras’ attack on St Nikodemos the Hagiorite and the *Philokalia*.²⁹

Perhaps a focal point in the development of Yannaras’ understanding of political hesychasm can be found in his short note on Political Theology.³⁰ For Yannaras, the goal of Orthodox Political Theology is to investigate the ‘authenticity of human existence’, which aims to ‘serve man according to his nature and his truth; and consequently to serve

²⁸ See Theoklitos Dionysiates, *The Heresy of the Neo-Orthodox: The Neo-Nicolaitism of Chrestos Yannaras*, Athens 1988; Theoklitos Dionysiates, *The Nicolaitan Error of the Neo-Orthodox, with a critique of Christos Yannaras*, Athens 1989.

²⁹ See Athanasopoulos 2021.

³⁰ See Yannaras, Christos, 1983, ‘A Note on Political Theology’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 27, p.53.

the political nature of humanity, i.e., the power of love, which is the heart of its existence and which is the condition of the true communion of persons, the true city, the true *polis*' (ibid). He finds that this can only be done through a certain 'apophaticism' toward the political (especially regarding political ideologies and established political perspectives). The ideal relational political dynamics according to Yannaras can only be achieved through an ecclesiastical unity such as in an Orthodox monastery, inspired by the hesychastic ideals of a separation from worldly pursuits but in obedience to the worldly-political hierarchy.³¹ In comparing the two (Meyendorff and Yannaras), Svetelj finds that even though Meyendorff argues that there is no anti-Western sentiment in Palamas' teaching, Yannaras claims in the hesychastic controversies in Byzantium we have a controversy between East and West.³²

Antoine Lévy, in his scholarly contribution to the debate regarding the use of the term, argues very convincingly that Palamas and his followers would not think that the term 'hesychasm' can have any political connotations. As Lévy notes, even at the time of St Markos Eugenikos and during his participation at the Florence Council (1439), when he considered himself a follower of hesychasm trying to protect the Orthodox world from papal influences and being involved in important ecclesiastical negotiations with remarkably political ramifications, there were no second thoughts regarding the *apolitical* character of hesychasm.³³

However, Lévy finds that ultimately, with the triumphant prevalence of Hesychastic Palamism in the later years of Byzantine Empire and Byzantine Orthodox theology in particular, it was inevitable that elements of hesychasm would be taken up by the Russian Orthodox world. He finds that the Russians were fascinated by hesychasm and hesychastic practices, especially the obedience of the novice monk to a hesychast elder, which is an essential part of the early stages of monastic hesychastic life. According to Lévy, this is what was particularly useful to Russian leaders who wished complete control both in political and in ecclesiastical powers. For Lévy, this early Russian blind obedience

³¹ Γιανναράς, Χρήστος, 1978, *Η Νέο-ελληνική ταυτότητα*, εκδ. Γρηγόρη, Αθήνα, σελ.204.

³² Svetelj, Tone, 2017/18, 'Gregory Palamas and Political Hesychasm in the Fourteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Analogia*, Volume 4, Issue 3, pp. 61–80.

³³ Lévy, Antoine "Political hesychasm" and the Foundational Structure of the Russian State', *Analogia*, Volume 5, 2018, pp.57–82; p.57, footnote 1.

to the focal control point of a consolidated political and ecclesiastical power is what influenced many Russian scholars in recent times to accept this development as ‘political hesychasm’ and develop political ideologies and cultural analysis to support this trend in recent Russian historical events (including the recent hegemony of political figures). Undoubtedly, Lévy’s claims merit a more detailed response (which I hope to provide soon), but I would like to raise here a few questions regarding the plausibility of Lévy’s analysis.

Firstly, that Russians have taken a term and made a whole new ideology out of it means nothing to the valid application of the term and its proper meaning. For a scholar approaching the question of appropriateness of the use and application of a term, poor uses in its application are interesting only insofar as this shows what the term should not and cannot mean, not to provide a historical justification of its misuse.

Secondly, it seems Lévy dismissed without much consideration the claim by S. Khoruji that a hesychast who turns to politics betrays the very spirit of hesychasm he is trying to defend by his way of life.³⁴ As many scholars in Russian Orthodox theology and ecclesiastical affairs note (among whom I would certainly classify Khoruji), there are many different perspectives in the reception of Byzantine Orthodox Theology in Russian theological circles. Obviously, this is the reason for Khoruji’s contribution in the current debates. Lévy thinks that G. M. Prochorov’s use of the term to influence contemporary Russian academic circles in their political analysis and commentary of recent Russian politics is capturing the quintessence of political hesychasm as it was and still is applied in Russia; one can only question this approach. Lévy would have to make a detailed commentary of all the various voices in this debate to conclude in the way that he does. To not engage with a voice expressing a different perspective from the author’s leaves the criticism incomplete.

Lastly, I would be very wary of applying terms with distinct history and contextual meaning (which previously had no primary political connotations) to newer forms of social and political engagement. This is not only anachronistic but also quite gravediggerish. As we are

³⁴ Lévy, *ibid*, pp.57–58.

very careful not to dig up the bones of our forefathers to create new tools from their bones, so we should respect terms and their original culture-specific meanings. To do otherwise would mean a purposeful interference into the conceptual and cultural history of terms, providing further support to our confusing trends and tendencies of our violent and warring world.

Conclusions

In the above investigation, we examined key contemporary approaches into the morality of war. Having established the poor record of the famous distinction between *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello* in providing a conclusive solution to the problem of war, we proceeded into examining Palamas' ontological and holistic view on war and violence. It was established that Palamas is following the Church Fathers in formulating an ontological and holistic diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of the disease that causes war and violence in our world. In discussing a contemporary use of hesychasm to justify particular political agendas, we found that this is an inappropriate use of the term, and it is quite anachronistic, making hesychasm lose its meaning and making its application in this composite term 'political hesychasm' questionable.

